

ARSON

DEFINITION

Arson is defined by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program as any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc.

Only fires determined through investigation to have been willfully or maliciously set are classified as arsons. Fires of suspicious or unknown origins are excluded.

Nationwide, a total of 11,976 law enforcement agencies provided 1 to 12 months of arson data for 1998, reporting a total of 78,094 arson offenses for the year. Among these agencies, 11,377 supplied detailed information such as the type of structure and estimated monetary value of the property damaged. These detailed data were tabulated for presentation on the following pages. Tables 12 through 15 offer further information regarding arson offenses and trends, and Tables 25 through 28 present additional figures on arson clearances. Data users should note that while these numbers provide an indicator of arson incidents, they do not represent the Nation's total arson experience since only 8,329 agencies covering 67 percent of the United States population submitted arson reports for all 12 months of the year.

The number of reported arson offenses declined 7 percent overall in 1998. Collectively, the Nation's cities reported a 9-percent decrease. Cities with populations of 1 million and over registered the largest decrease, 14 percent. However, a 1-percent increase was noted in suburban counties, while rural counties experienced a 3-percent decrease. (See Table 12.)

Geographically, arson offenses declined in all areas. A 12-percent drop occurred in the Midwest, and in the Northeast, arson offenses fell 10 percent. Lower arson totals were also recorded in the West at 6 percent and in the South at 4 percent.

Table 2.31

Arson Rate

by Population Group, 1998

[8,329 agencies; 1998 estimated population 180,475,000; rate per 100,000 inhabitants]

Group	Rate
Total	38.9
Total cities	45.0
Group I (cities 250,000 and over)	75.3
(cities 1,000,000 and over)	76.5
(cities 500,000 to 999,999)	74.3
(cities 250,000 to 499,999)	74.7
Group II (cities 100,000 to 249,999)	42.5
Group III (cities 50,000 to 99,999)	34.2
Group IV (cities 25,000 to 49,999)	28.1
Group V (cities 10,000 to 24,999)	21.6
Group VI (cities under 10,000)	28.4
Suburban counties	29.2
Rural counties	17.6
Suburban area	26.4

By property type, the following decreases were noted nationally in 1998: structural arson declined 12 percent; arson of mobile property decreased 10 percent; and arson of all other properties (crops, signs, merchandise stored outside structures, etc.) declined 4 percent. (See Table 15.)

Data users are cautioned when reviewing arson trend information since improved arson reporting procedures may have influenced percent change figures. As collection continues, year-to-year statistical comparability is expected to improve.

Rate

Since population coverage for arson data is lower than for the other Crime Index offenses, arson rates per 100,000 inhabitants are tabulated independently. Based on figures from law enforcement agencies supplying 12 months of statistics for all Index crimes including arson, the 1998 rates are presented in Table 2.31.

Overall, the 1998 national arson rate was 39 per 100,000 population. In cities with populations over 1 million, law enforcement agencies recorded an arson rate of 77 per 100,000 inhabitants. Collectively, all cities reported a rate of 45. Rates of 29 and 18 per 100,000 inhabitants were recorded in the suburban counties and in rural counties, respectively.

Regionally, the highest arson rate was registered in the Southern States with 20 offenses per 100,000 population. Following were the Northeastern States with 17 arson offenses reported per 100,000 inhabitants, the Midwestern States with 15 per 100,000, and the Western States with 13 per 100,000.

Nature

Consistent with previous years' data, those arsons that targeted structures were the most frequently reported arsons in 1998, accounting for 47 percent of total reported arson incidents. Thirty percent of reported arson offenses were

Table 2.32

Arson

by Type of Property, 1998

[11,377 agencies; 1998 estimated population 194,539,000]

Property classification	Number of offenses	Percent distribution ¹
Total	66,508	100.0
Total structure	31,239	47.0
Single occupancy residential	13,555	20.4
Other residential	5,642	8.5
Storage	2,512	3.8
Industrial/manufacturing	356	.5
Other commercial	3,357	5.0
Community/public	3,578	5.4
Other structure	2,239	3.4
Total mobile	19,680	29.6
Motor vehicles	18,721	28.1
Other mobile	959	1.4
Other	15,589	23.4

¹ Because of rounding, percentages may not add to total.

directed at mobile property (motor vehicles, trailers, etc.), while the remaining 23 percent of reported arsons were attributed to other types of property (crops, timber, etc.).

During 1998, residential property arson comprised 61 percent of structural arsons, with 43 percent of structural arson offenses directed at single-family dwellings. Regarding all targeted structures, 20 percent involved property that was either uninhabited or abandoned at the time of the arson.

Motor vehicles accounted for 95 percent of mobile property arsons.

The monetary value of property damaged due to reported arsons in 1998 averaged \$12,561 per incident. Overall, the average loss for all types of structures was \$22,683. Mobile properties averaged \$5,506 per incident, and other targets averaged \$1,185.

Table 2.33

Arson

Structures Not in Use, 1998

[11,377 agencies; 1998 estimated population 194,539,000]

Type of structure	Number of offenses	Percent not in use
Total	31,239	19.8
Single occupancy residential	13,555	23.6
Other residential	5,642	14.0
Storage	2,512	24.4
Industrial/manufacturing	356	27.0
Other commercial	3,357	15.3
Community/public	3,578	10.7
Other structure	2,239	25.9

Law Enforcement Response

The 1998 arson clearance rate was 16 percent both nationwide and in cities collectively. Law enforcement agencies in cities with 10,000 to 24,999 inhabitants registered the highest clearance rate, 25 percent. Agencies in rural counties recorded a 23-percent clearance rate, and those in suburban counties, 15 percent. (See Table 25.)

Regionally, the Southern States reported an arson clearance rate of 20 percent; the Midwestern States, 15 percent; the Northeastern States, 17 percent; and the Western States, 13 percent.

Forty-five percent of all 1998 arson clearances involved only juveniles (persons under age 18), representing a higher percentage of juvenile involvement than for any other Index crime. With regard to arson type, persons in this age group accounted for 24 percent of the clearances for arsons of mobile property, 45 percent of structural arson clearances, and 59 percent of those for arsons of all other property. Forty-seven percent of arson clearances in the Nation's cities collectively were attributed to juvenile offenders, 44 percent in suburban counties, and 30 percent in rural counties.

Table 2.34

Arson

Monetary Value of Property Damaged, 1998

[11,377 agencies; 1998 estimated population 194,539,000]

Property classification	Number of offenses	Average damage
Total	66,508	\$12,561
Total structure	31,239	22,683
Single occupancy residential	13,555	17,467
Other residential	5,642	19,022
Storage	2,512	33,992
Industrial/manufacturing	356	185,483
Other commercial	3,357	38,433
Community/public	3,578	18,159
Other structure	2,239	8,521
Total mobile	19,680	5,506
Motor vehicles	18,721	5,172
Other mobile	959	12,013
Other	15,589	1,185

The following tables provide clearance data for those 11,377 law enforcement agencies who furnished detailed information, including a breakdown by type for structural and mobile classifications. The highest clearance rates for arsons were those of community/public structures, 32 percent, while the lowest clearance rates were for motor vehicles, 7 percent, as shown in Table 2.35.

Eighty-five percent of the estimated 17,200 persons arrested for arson nationally in 1998 were males. Fifty-two percent of the arrestees were under 18 years of age, and 69 percent were under 25. Of those who were arrested, whites accounted for 74 percent of the arrestees, blacks comprised 24 percent, and persons of other races comprised the remainder.

Table 2.35

Arson

Offenses Cleared by Arrest¹, 1998

[11,377 agencies; 1998 estimated population 194,539,000]

Property classification	Number of offenses	Percent cleared by arrest
Total	66,508	18.0
Total structure	31,239	23.9
Single occupancy residential	13,555	24.6
Other residential	5,642	25.3
Storage	2,512	19.9
Industrial/manufacturing	356	30.6
Other commercial	3,357	15.9
Community/public	3,578	32.2
Other structure	2,239	18.7
Total mobile	19,680	7.9
Motor vehicles	18,721	7.4
Other mobile	959	17.6
Other	15,589	18.7

¹ Includes offenses cleared by exceptional means.

Table 2.36

Arson Offenses Cleared by Arrest¹

of Persons under 18 Years of Age, 1998

[11,377 agencies; 1998 estimated population 194,539,000]

Property classification	Total clearances	Percent under 18
Total	11,942	44.5
Total structure	7,477	44.1
Single occupancy residential	3,336	35.0
Other residential	1,429	37.4
Storage	501	53.9
Industrial/manufacturing	109	39.4
Other commercial	533	35.8
Community/public	1,151	74.1
Other structure	418	56.2
Total mobile	1,547	23.9
Motor vehicles	1,378	21.9
Other mobile	169	39.6
Other	2,918	56.5

¹ Includes offenses cleared by exceptional means.

When comparing figures from 1998 to 1997, arson arrests declined 8 percent nationally. By community type, a decrease of 9 percent was recorded in cities collectively; in rural counties, a decrease of 7 percent; and in suburban counties, a decrease of 5 percent.

Nationwide, both juvenile and adult arrests for arson were 8 percent lower than the previous year's figures. Arrests of both males and females declined during the same period, decreasing by 9 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

Five- and 10-year trends show that 1998 arson arrest totals for all ages were 18 percent lower than the 1994 arrest total and 6 percent below the 1989 total.